



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, Montana 59101-4669



IN REPLY TO:
4700

April 7, 2006

Dear Interested Party:

The Billings Field Office (BiFO) has developed an environmental assessment (EA, MT-010-06-19) outlining relevant information about the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR) and presenting alternatives for wild horse population control. Under the proposed action, fertility control will be applied to all mares 11 years of age and older (24 total in 2006) for the purposes of suppressing herd growth rates. Treatment with the immunocontraceptive Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) vaccine would continue annually through 2010. All mares that are 11 years of age would be added to the treatment program each year (four mares in 2006 and an estimated five mares in 2007, six mares in 2008, six mares in 2009 and four mares in 2010). Please note:

- Treatment of 11 year old mares would be suspended for at least one year if the surviving foal crop (from the year before) falls below 25% of recorded foals.
- Treatment of 12-15 year old mares would be suspended for at least one year if the surviving foal crop (from the year before) falls below 10% of recorded foals.

In addition, the BiFO is proposing to capture and remove up to 24 age-specific wild horses from the PMWHR. As with previous selective removals, the intent is not to remove any horses that are currently harem stallions or core breeding-age mares (6-10 years old) from the herd. An estimated 12 bachelor stallions (4-8 years of age) and 12 yearlings (no more than 50% of any age class), have been determined excess and would be removed due to deteriorating range conditions. The method of capture will be bait-trapping. Please note:

- **A public hearing for the use of motorized vehicles in the management of wild horses will be held at the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area Visitors Center in Lovell, Wyoming, on Thursday June 8 2006, from 7-8 pm.** Public comments will be heard and recorded regarding the use of motorized vehicles in PMWHR management efforts only.
- All removed horses will be available for adoption by a sealed-bid competitive process to qualified and pre-approved individuals as determined by the BiFO.
- Any horses not adopted by sealed bid will be sent to the BLM Rock Springs, Wyoming holding facility. Older (4-8 years old) unadopted stallions would be gelded and provided 90-120 days of ground and halter-training.
- All remaining horses would be made available to the public via the BLM internet adoption program.

The proposed population controls are necessary to immediately reduce herd size to nearer the appropriate management level (AML) of 85-105 adult horses (MT-025-2-18) and to suppress herd growth rates. The result will be decreased forage demands on drought-stressed resources. This EA addresses the justification, methods and procedures to be used in implementing this population control and addresses the environmental impacts of such action on the PMWHR. The EA is available at <http://www.mt.blm.gov/bifo/index.html> or by contacting the BiFO.

Since 1996, the Pryor Mountain wild horse herd has averaged 140 adult horses and 24 foals. The herd currently consists of 135 adult horses and approximately 24 surviving foals from 2005. A minimum of 26 foals is expected in 2006. Genetic research suggests that maintaining an average of 140-150 total horses may

facilitate genetic conservation within the herd. However, updated range utilization and trend studies provide clear evidence that the health of the designated range is deteriorating and must be provided relief from wild horse grazing impacts that are exceeding proper use levels. No additional range will be available to the horses in the short-term and any further evaluation of appropriate management level or possible range expansion is to be considered through the land use planning process for the BiFO and the Custer National Forest scheduled to begin in 2007/2008.


The proposed fertility control is scheduled to begin no earlier than July 10, 2006, and will continue annually through 2010. The proposed bait-trapping is scheduled to begin no earlier than July 10, 2006, and may continue through September 30, 2006 as necessary.

Public comments to the enclosed EA must be submitted in writing, contain original signatures and be postmarked by Friday, May 5, 2006.

All public comments submitted, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

Thank you for your interest in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. If you have questions concerning this EA, please contact Linda Coates-Markle, State Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, at (406) 896-5013.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra S. Brooks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sandra S. Brooks
Billings Field Manager